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THE TEACHER'S DUTY TO THE PUPIL.

BY HIS EMINENCE, CARDINAL GIBBONS.

THE importance of the subject briefly treated in this article may be estimated by the host of teachers and scholars. The teachers of the United States are numbered by tens of thousands, while the pupils, ecclesiastical and secular, frequenting public and private schools, colleges and academies, reach several millions.

The progress that these scholars make in their studies, largely depends on the intelligence, diligence and capacity of the teachers.

Plutarch, in a letter to his former pupil, the Emperor Trajan, says : " I am sensible that you sought not the Empire. Your modesty, however, makes you still more worthy of the honors you had no ambition to solicit. Should your future government be in keeping with your former merit, I shall have reason to congratulate both your virtue and my own good fortune on this great event ; but if otherwise, you have exposed yourself to danger and me to obloquy ; for the faults of the scholar will be imputed to the master. Only continue to be what you are. Let your government commence in your breast ; and lay the foundations of it in the command of your passions. If you make virtue the rule of your conduct and the end of your actions, everything will proceed in harmony and order. I have explained to you the spirit of those laws and constitutions that were established by your predecessors, and you have nothing to do but to carry them into execution. If this should be the case, I shall have the glory of having formed an Emperor to virtue ; but if otherwise, let this letter remain a testimony to succeeding ages, that you did not ruin the Roman empire under pretence of the counsels or the authority of Plutarch."

From the words of Plutarch we may draw this important lesson, that the moral precepts of the teacher will exercise but little influence on the scholar, unless they are enforced by his own example. But if his life is in harmony with the instructions which he inculcates, they will make a deep and lasting impression on the heart of his pupil. For if the edifying demeanor of those whom we casually meet in the walks of life is a stimulus to virtue, how potential for good, and how enduring is the exemplary conduct of the professor who is the official guide of our susceptible youth!

Every one admits the truth of the Horatian axiom that persons are more deeply affected by what they see than by what they hear. If this maxim can be affirmed of all men, how much more forcible is its application to the impressionable scholar!

The pupil's character is almost unconsciously formed after the model of his instructor. The impression produced on the youthful mind, by the tutor's example, has been happily compared to letters cut in the bark of a young tree which deepen and broaden with time.

Of our excellent teachers, we can say in the words of John Sterling:

"Ever their phantoms rise before us,
Our loftier brothers, but one in blood;
By bed and table they lord it o'er us,
With looks of kindness and words of good."

The institution, in which a man studies, is supposed to exert so dominant an influence in moulding his character, that his *Alma Mater* is as sure to be mentioned by his biographer as the parents from whom he sprang.

So close, indeed, and tender and far-reaching are the relations subsisting between the teacher and his pupils, that the master feels honored by the virtuous and distinguished career of his scholar, while he has a sense of personal humiliation should the pupil's record prove dishonorable and scandalous. Harvard or Yale, Princeton or Georgetown, is eager to claim as her son the statesman, the jurist, or the man of letters who chanced to have drunk at her fountain of knowledge. Oxford would have gladly erected within her walls a monument to her peerless son, Cardinal Newman, had she not been thwarted by unreasoning bigotry. In like manner, our ecclesiastical colleges and seminaries refer

with commendable complacency to their alumni who have distinguished themselves as priests or prelates in the paths of science and virtue. As Cato, in his old age, pointed with pride to the widespreading trees that his hands had planted in early manhood, so will the venerable teacher contemplate with admiration every fresh blossom or fruit that enriches the living tree reared and cultivated in his nursery of learning.

But while the preceptor enjoys the reflected honor that beams on his favored scholar, public sentiment makes him share, in some measure, though often unjustly, the odium attached to a pupil whose public life has been stained by unworthy conduct. The good name of Quintilian was marred by the vicious conduct of some of his scholars. The reputation of Seneca suffered on account of the crimes of Nero, his former pupil. The reproach seems, however, to be unmerited, for, as long as the young prince followed the instructions and counsels of his preceptor, he was loved by the Roman people; but when he fell into the hands of other masters, he became the shame of the human race. The exterior gravity and propriety of Seneca were a continual censure on his pupil's vices.

The professors of our colleges and seminaries should be profoundly impressed with the dignity and grave responsibility of their position. They are the constituted guardians of their pupils *in loco parentis*. It should be their constant aim that the lustre of the jewels confided to their keeping be not dimmed by neglect, but that they reflect more and more the brightness of the Sun of Justice. "What is more noble," says St. John Chrysostom, "than to form the minds of youth? He who fashions the morals of children performs a task, in my judgment, more sublime than that of any painter or sculptor." In contemplating the magnificent works of art exhibited in the churches of Rome, we extol the great masters who produced them, and we know not which to admire more, the paintings and statues which adorn St. Peter's Basilica, or the temple itself in which those masterpieces are enshrined. But the teacher, in moulding the character of the youths committed to his care, is engaged in a pursuit far more worthy of our admiration. He is creating living portraits destined to adorn, not only our earthly temples, but also the temple of God in heaven "not made by hands."

The professor who would aim at shaping the character of all

his students according to one uniform ideal standard, would be attempting the impossible, because he would be striving to do what is at variance with the laws of nature and of nature's God. In all the Creator's works, there is charming variety. There are no two stars in the firmament equal in magnitude and splendor, "for star differeth from star in glory;" there are no two leaves of the forest alike, no two grains of sand, no two human faces. Neither can there be two men absolutely identical in mental capacity or moral disposition. One may excel in solid judgment, another in tenacity of memory, and a third in brilliancy of imagination. One is naturally grave and solemn, another is gay and vivacious. One is of a phlegmatic, another of a sanguine temperament. One is constitutionally shy, timid and reserved; another is bold and demonstrative. One is taciturn, another has his heart in his mouth. The teacher should take his pupils as God made them, and aid them in bringing out the hidden powers of their soul. If he tries to adopt the leveling process by casting all in the same mould, his pupils will become forced and unnatural in their movements; they will lose heart, their spirit will be broken, their manhood crippled and impaired.

"I will respect human liberty," says Monseigneur Dupanloup, "in the smallest child even more scrupulously than in a grown man; for the latter can defend himself against me, while the child cannot. Never shall I insult the child so far as to regard him as material to be cast into a mould, and to emerge with a stamp given by my will."

Instead of laboring to crush and subdue their natural traits and propensities, he should rather divert them into a proper channel. The admonition which would be properly administered to a sullen or obstinate youth deliberately erring, might be excessive, if given to one of an ardent or sensitive nature acting from impulse or levity.

One day, an abbot of some reputation for piety, was complaining to St. Anselm about the boys who were being educated in the monastery. "Though we flog them continually," said he, "yet they become worse." "And," queried St. Anselm, "how do they turn out when grown to be young men?" "Stupid and dull," answered the abbot. "At that rate," exclaimed the saint, "the system you employ is a model one for stunting intellectual growth. My dear abbot, suppose you were to plant a tree in your

garden and shut it in on all sides so that it could not shoot forth its branches, what might you expect save a twisted, tangled, and worthless trunk ? Now, by enslaving the spirit of children, by leaving them no liberty of action, you foster in them narrow, vicious, and wicked propensities, which, growing stronger day by day, resist every effort to change and eradicate them. Finding, moreover, that you are neither kind nor amiable, they will put no confidence in you ; they will believe that you are moved by motives of dislike and envy. These inclinations increase with their years, and their minds and hearts grow bent to vice. Devoid of Christian charity, their views of the world and of life become utterly distorted. Now, tell me, were you in the place of these boys, would you be pleased with such treatment as you give them ? ”

The abbot threw himself at the feet of St. Anselm, admitted his lack of tact and discretion, and promised amendment.

Jesus Christ is the model Teacher. His conduct toward His disciples is the best example to be followed. He did not attempt to quench their natural spirit, but He purified and sanctified it in the fires of Pentecost. After Peter had graduated in the school of his Master, he remained the same ardent man that he had ever been. His vehement energies were expended, however, not in defending his Saviour's person with the material sword, which he had formerly used in cutting off the ear of Malchus, but in wielding the sword of the Spirit in the cause of righteousness. The sons of Zebedee were ambitious of glory. Ambition is in itself a magnanimous sentiment ; therefore, Christ did not smother it in their breast, but He ennobled it by directing it to higher and holier ends. He taught them to aspire to a heavenly, instead of an earthly kingdom. Paul, after his conversion, retained the fiery zeal that had marked the youthful Pharisee, though it was now transformed into a zeal tempered by charity, and it found vent in evangelizing the world. Instead of dragging Christians before civil tribunals, as he was wont to do, we now find him arraigning Jews and Gentiles before the tribunal of conscience. Our Saviour did not blame Thomas for opening his mind and expressing his honest doubt upon the fact of the Resurrection ; but he gently reasoned with him, and removed that doubt by a palpable argu-

ment. In the same way, should the professor study, as far as possible, the individual character of his pupils, and adapt his instructions and admonitions to the capacity and temperament of each.

Regarding the discipline to be observed in our colleges and seminaries, the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore lays down the following judicious rules: "Let the discipline for regulating the whole course of life in the seminary be so arranged that it may savor neither of excessive rigor nor indulge pernicious laxity. The vigilance of superiors should be so tempered and moderated in maintaining it that it will not pry too closely into minute details, nor so hamper the minds of youth, as it were with chains, as to impede the normal expansion of their energies."

While the vigilance of superiors should be active in observing and prompt in correcting abuses, it should be entirely free from a spirit of espionage and distrust, which is calculated to make hypocrites, and to provoke the clandestine violation of rules. If the students are persuaded that they are habitually suspected and watched, they will also have their eye on their professors. They will take a morbid pleasure in eating the forbidden fruit, in drinking the "stolen waters, which are sweeter, and eating hidden bread, which is more pleasant." Like those that try to avoid the *Octroi* in French towns, they will come to regard their offences as purely penal without any moral sanction attached to them.

I once heard of a professor who always presupposed that the students were untrustworthy until they gave proof of virtue. The opposite rule, which assumes that they are good until their vicious character is made manifest, is, certainly, to be preferred. A gentleman once informed me that the principal of the academy in Europe in which he had made his studies, had an observatory, from which he could view all the boys in their respective rooms, and take note of any misdemeanor they might commit.

All right-minded men will agree that it is far better that youths should be religiously impressed with a sense of God's presence, that their enlightened conscience should be their monitor, and that the Faculty should appeal to their moral rectitude and honor rather than to their sense of fear.

This generous confidence in the student's honor is calculated

to develop a higher and nobler type of manhood, and to fit young men for the great world in which they will have no preceptors to admonish them, and in which their conscience will be their chief and often their only guide. And besides, wherever this method of government obtains, whatever chastisement may be inflicted on the transgressor in vindication of the law, will be sanctioned and applauded by the students themselves; for they feel that any grave violation of college discipline affects their personal honor and good name. I am happy to say that this system prevails in all the institutions of learning with which I am acquainted.

St. Augustine, in his *Confessions*, complains of the excessive harshness and severity of some teachers of his time. They multiply, he says, the labors and sorrows through which the sons of Adam are obliged to pass. Youth are better governed by motives of love and filial reverence than by servile fear, and their tasks are more diligently learned when enjoined by principles of duty than when enforced by threats of punishment; for "no one," he adds, "doth ever well what he doth against his will, even though what he doth be well."

The mode of punishment inflicted on refractory subjects has varied according to the popular sentiment prevailing at different times and in different countries. We are told in the *Life of Plutarch* that corporal chastisement was not tolerated in the school which he frequented in Greece. This authority was exercised only by parents. "The office of the teacher was to inform the mind. He had no power to extinguish the flame of freedom, or break down the noble independence of the soul by the degrading application of the rod." Plutarch informs us of a novel and ingenious method employed by his preceptor Ammonius in correcting his pupils. "Our master," he says, "having one day observed that we had indulged too freely at dinner, ordered his freedman, during his afternoon lecture, to give his own son the discipline of the whip in our presence. The philosopher all the while had his eye upon us, and we knew well for whom the example of punishment was intended." Our American youth would, I presume, submit with patient resignation to this vicarious sort of punishment, for it is easy to bear the misfortunes of others.

The experience of General Sheridan's schooldays was not so agreeable. His teacher had less scruple than Ammonius about

physical correction. He tells us in his *Personal Memoirs* that, when a youth, he attended a private school in Ohio. Whenever any one of the boys committed a serious breach of discipline, if the teacher was unable to detect the culprit, as was usually the case, "he would consistently apply the switch to the whole school without discrimination." It must be conceded that by this means he never failed to catch the real mischief-maker.

So great an authority as Dr. Johnson advocates moderate corporal punishment as an efficient means for curbing perverse and refractory spirits.

The ancient Lacedaemonian father was accustomed to inflict a second punishment on his son who complained of being chastised; for, he held, "he who would take the trouble to correct the son, showed thereby his affection for the father."

But the spirit of this country seems to be growing more and more averse to the application of the rod. I am persuaded that neither the authority of the sturdy Dr. Johnson nor the example of the Lacedaemonians will have any effect in supplanting the milder regime now in force in our educational institutions, especially in our Catholic colleges and seminaries; for while American fathers admit the wisdom of Solomon's maxim: "He that spareth the rod, hateth his son," they are reluctant to delegate to others their paternal prerogative.

It will be generally admitted, in conclusion, that he is a model disciplinarian who combines the paternal and maternal attributes in his relations to his pupils. While he is always expected to maintain the authority of a father, he should exhibit in a more marked degree, the affection and tenderness of a mother; for he who gains our heart easily commands the attention of our mind.

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